

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15

CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06

PRS-01 /059 W

-----261312Z 123781 /53

R 261230Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9250

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 1047

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GB, KN, KS

SUBJECT: BONGO TO VISIT PYONGYANG

REF: LIBREVILLE 0386

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT BONGON HAS AGREED TO VISIT PYONGYANG, AND IS CURRENTLY EXPECTED TO DEPART FROM LIBREVILLE MAY 2 FOR TRIP INCLUDING STOP IN PEKING. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY HAS REPORTED I TWO RECENT AIRGRAMS (A-17, APRIL 9, AND A-20, APRIL 23) WARMING TREND IN RELATIONS BETWEEN GABON AND NORTH KOREA, CULMINATING IN VISIT OF GOG MINISTER TO NORTH KOREA AND AUDIENCE GRANTED BY PRESIDENT BONGO APRIL 18 TO DPRK AMBASSADOR FOR FIRST TIME SINCE LATTER PRESENTED CREDENTIALS TWO YEARS AGO.

2. FURTHER STEPS IN PROCESS NOW SCHEDULED FOR THIS WEEK AND NEXT, BEGINNING WITH ANTICIPATED ARRIVAL IN LIBREVILLE APRIL 26 OF DPRK DELEGATION AT VICE MINISTERIAL LEVEL. THIS IS TO BE FOLLOWED BY BONGOS OWN TRIP TO PYONGYANG (VIA PEKING), FOR WHICH HE IS EXPECTED TO LEAVE LIBREVILLE ON MAY 2.

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3. SOUTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR HAS BEEN TRYING FOR PAST FEW WEEKS TO HEAD OFF PYONGYANG VISIT OR ALTERNATIVELY TO PERSUADE PRESIDENT TO INCLUDE BALANCING VISIT TO SEOUL. BOTH DPRK AND PRC REPRESENTATIVE THERE HAVE BEEN ARGUING THAT TRIP TO PYONGYANG IS MERELY BALANCE FOR VISIT PAID TO SEOUL IN 1976 AND THUS FAR THEY APPEAR TO HAVE PREVAILED.

4. COMMENT: BONGO CONSIDERED DPRK TO OUTER DARKNESS WHEN ITS MINIONS HEAVY HANDEDLY ATTEMPTED TO BLOCK HIS SEOUL VISIT TWO YEARS AGO, AND VOWED HE WOULD NOT RECEIVE NORTH KOREAN AMBASSADOR UNTIL DPRK PRESENTED FORMAL APOLOGY FOR "INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS." WHILE NO ANNOUNCEMENT HAS BEEN MADE, NORTH KOREANS HAVE PRESUMABLY OFFERED EXCUSES AND SOME FURTHER INDUCEMENT TO PUT BONGO IN NEWLY CONCILIATORY FRAME OF MIND. BEYOND ANY POSSIBLE MATERIAL BENEFITS OF CLOSER FRIENDSHIP WITH DPRK, BONGO MAY BE COUNTING ON PEKING-PYONGYANG TRIP TO REGAIN HIS NON ALIGNED CREDENTIALS IN WAKE OF MUCH PUBLICIZED MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENTS CARTER AND GISCARD.

5. REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER RAPPROCHEMENT WITH DPRK WILL HAVE ANY INFLUENCE ON GOG POSITION WHEN KOREAN QUESTIONS ARE RAISED IN UN OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA. WE WILL CONTINUE TO LEAN ON GABONESE AS APPROPRIATE TO HOLD TO THEIR FIRM PRO ROK POSTURE, BUT KEY TO SUCCESS OF THIS EFFORT PROBABLY LIES WITH ROK.

6. IN THIS REGARD, EMBASSY SEOUL MAY WISH SUGGEST TO ROK THAT IT AVOID OVER REACTION TO BOMBS PYONGYANG VISIT AND MAINTAIN ITS OWN RELATIONS WITH GOG ON EVEN KEEL. IN LONGER TERM, DPRK WILL PROBABLY NOT BE ABLE TO MATCH ROK CONTRIBUTIONS TO GABONESE DEVELOPMENT, AND LIKELY DISILLUSIONMENT WITH NORTH KOREANS WILL ONCE AGAIN WORK TO SOUTH KOREAN ADVANTAGE SO LONG AS ROK IS ON THE SPOT TO BENEFIT.

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7. FYI: ROK AMBASSADOR KIM APPEARS PROFOUNDLY DISCOURAGED AT PROSPECT OF PYONGYANG TRIP AND MAY RECOMMEND SOME SLOW DOWN OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION AS RETALIATORY MEASURE, WHICH WE BELIEVE COULD HAVE EFFECT OPPOSITE TO THAT INTENDED AND PROVE SERIOUSLY HARMFUL TO ROK INTERESTS. SUGGESTION OF APPROACH TO ROK IS ADVANCED WITH THIS IN MIND BUT NO REFERENCE SHOULD BE MADE TO AMBASSADOR KIM'S STATE OF MIND. END FYI. STEIGMAN

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## Message Attributes

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Margaret P. Grafeld  
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